

AN
ELEGY
ON
THE DEATH
OF
An amiable YOUNG LADY.

WITH
An Epistle from MENALCAS to LYCIDAS,

To which are prefixed,

Three Critical Recommendatory LETTERS,

by James Beattie

EDINBURGH

Printed by A. DONALDSON and J. REID

For ALEX. DONALDSON

MDCCLXI.

THE LIFE OF

THE DEATH

OF AN UNFORTUNATE LADY.



An Epistle from Menarchos to Lycidas.

To which are prefixed

Three Critical Recommendation Letters.

EDINBURGH:

Printed by A. Donaldson and J. Reid.

For A. & J. Donaldson.

MDCCLXXI.

A D V E R T I S E M E N T.

THE world is obliged to an unknown author for the following excellent poems. They were sent to Mr *Donaldson*, with intention to be published in the second volume of his collection of poems, which will appear next winter. But, upon being examined by some gentlemen of taste, they were thought to have so much merit, that they are here offered to the public by themselves. As none need be ashamed of encouraging genius, the gentlemen whose opinions were consulted, have permitted them to be printed with the initials of their names. It is to be hoped that any inaccuracies in the letters will be excused, as they were wrote in a great hurry, with little regard to style, being indeed nothing more than the warm overflowings of souls susceptible of the ravishing beauties of genuine poetry.

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To the Honourable A*** E***.

MY DEAR SIR,

I AM just now favoured with your obliging letter, inclosing some copies of verses. I return you thanks for the favourable opinion you entertain of my taste: but permit me to say, that C——n E—— has no occasion to call in the aid of any other judgment, to enable him to determine the merit of works of taste and genius, especially of the poetic kind. A good author must necessarily be a sound critic; and one who discovers so much fire, and, at the same time, correctness, in his own productions, is well qualified to judge of the beauties and defects of others. But as extreme modesty is often the attendant of consummate merit, I suppose you don't care to rely solely on your own judgment in a matter of this consequence. You are anxious that Mr Donaldson's collection should be uniform, and that the second volume should contain nothing unworthy of the first; for which reason, perhaps,

B

you

you wish to have your own opinion of these two poems confirmed by mine; on which, I am afraid, you rely more than it deserves. Probably the laws of Parnassus, like those of our own country, require two witnesses to ascertain any fact of importance.

BUT to proceed: I am astonished how, during this long preamble, I have been able to suppress those exclamations of applause, which I utter insensibly every time I read or think of these poems. By heavens! I never saw any thing that pleased me more. Nor do I know to which the preference is due. In the elegy however, I am apt to think, the author's genius appears most conspicuously; and, if I am not mistaken, his turn rather leads him to the plaintive strains of Terence, than to the gay and animated compositions of Tibullus. The subject too is happily chosen. The bard seems to be young; and what subject suits the warm imagination and delicate sensibility of a juvenile poet, better than the early, premature, and unexpected death of a lady, for whom he probably entertained the most refined affection! It is upon occasions of this kind

kind that a poet can give way to those emotions of grief and anguish, which never fail to affect every reader of taste with sadness and melancholy. When the mind is truly agitated, it despises trivial ornaments; it overlooks small inaccuracies. To this is to be imputed your meeting with nothing very ornamented or figurative in the diction, and now and then with a hard word, ill spelled, and worse chosen. Does not the native simplicity of the poet, in a thousand instances, atone for these defects?

Thou number'd lies among the numerous dead.

How pretty is that recurrence of numbers in the same line! yet happily is it varied: and, if you will try, as Mr Sheridan directs you, to pronounce these words frequently, you will observe how trippingly they go off the tongue, *numerous number, numerous number*; and there is a cadence on the last syllable, *ber*, that I defy you not to pronounce. You may observe also the propriety of the epithet *numerous*, when applied to the dead.

THE conclusion also is most tender and affecting, and contains that abruptness, and those repetitions which constitute the language of grief.

Adieu, — adieu, — a long — a last farewell.

I HAVE only to add, that instead of advising Mr Donaldson to reserve these poems for his collection; or even indeed, in compliance with the author's request, to bury them in a Magazine, I should think he would do both himself and the author more justice to publish them on a small detached quarto of two or three pages. By this means they would be universally known and admired, and would certainly add lustre and eclat to the collection in which they should afterward appear. It is by this obvious and ingenious method that my good friend Mr Doddsley at London has established his reputation as a man of taste, enriched himself, and become the only bookseller in that city, really known to, and esteemed by people of fashion and rank. In great haste, I submit these observations to you; but I wish you would

“ also

also consult Mr B——, who really has a very sound judgment in matters of this kind.

I have the honour to be,

DEAR SIR,

Your most obedient servant,

Edinb. Aug. 2.

1761.

G***D***

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To G***D***, Esq;

DEAR SIR,

I HAVE just now received your epistle, which contains, I think, the most candid criticism I ever saw: I was only sorry to see it so short; every line of poetry, I am sure, deserves two of observations; but what I am remarkably pleased with, is the strange coincidence between your sentiments and mine. I may really and with truth say, that the first time I beheld you, I saw in your face a true feeling and just relish of the fine arts, particularly poetry, (poetry sent down by the gods, to cheer us

in this gloomy, forlorn, and dreary waste of life); I saw numbers (both blank verses and rhymes) imprinted upon your countenance; and if you had presented me with an epic poem superior to Homer's, I should not have been surprised. Euripides, the famous Greek poet, has a line so agreeable to what I am saying, that I cannot forbear sending you a translation of it:

Apollo light'ned in his cat-grey eyes.

IN fact, the only way of judging the merit of a poet is by his eyes. It was in this manner Homer was found out, although he was blind. Your modesty has, I know, as yet only suffered you to publish in the *Scots Magazine*; but, alas! one might as well pretend to exhibit a little cow as a show in the highlands of Scotland, a purse of gold as somewhat remarkable on the coast of Guinea, or a t—d as an extraordinary spectacle in the streets of Edinburgh, as endeavour to become conspicuous in that ill-fated collection. Would you believe it, Sir? A fable of mine, full of the *naïvete* or simplicity absolutely necessary in that species of composition, after being inserted there, was never, (with astonishment I speak it, and

with

with amazement you shall hear it), I say, never heard of more; lost like a goodly city suddenly swallowed up by an earthquake, like a louse annihilated in a large fire, or a human excrement dropped in a full capacious chamberpot. Oh! my friend, let this deter you; and, for heaven's sake, chuse some other methods of making your compositions public. In this case, what expedient so readily offers as making use of the humane and benevolent Mr D——, a gentleman, who, like a friendly star, helps every dark and benighted poet into the haven of general approbation. By his help, the rays of my genius have diverged with uncommon and rapid streams of luminary particles, into the remotest and most unenlightened corners of these kingdoms: by his assistance Mr B—— is to fix the nave of that wheel, whose spokes will reach such a prodigious distance. Would to God we three could live to latest posterity, and be witnesses of our applause from ages yet to come, world without end. Praise is the food of poets; notwithstanding Mr D—— frequently gives them very good dinners. This of course brings me back to the subject of this letter, which I did not think so soon to have entered upon, as I had a few more points

points to discuss. But to proceed: The bard, of whose poems we have been all this time talking, seems to possess the true elegiac humanity of Glutheros, who flourished before or about the time of Homer. It is true, he is not so merry as Lucretius, nor so sad as Horace; neither is he altogether so soft and tender as Juvenal in his satires; he is not quite so *simplex* in his *munditiis* as Lucan, neither has his work the modern air of the old poet Ennius; but these are slight faults. I cannot pretend to say whether he writes elegies like Terence, as I never saw that book in which they are contained, the only copy of which, they say, is lodged in the bend of the hanging tower at Pisa *. Here I cannot help regretting that I have as yet travelled very little; how happy are you, Sir, in that respect? I think it was at Rome you got your copy of the great Glutheros, which is an invaluable curiosity. For my part, I once drank a glass of old hock out of Buchanan's head at Copenhagen, which was the only remarkable incident that happened me in a long voyage up the Mediterranean. I agree with you in thinking that the bard, of whom we have all this time been talk-

* See Father Montfaucon's antiquities of Italy.

ing, discovers here and there a noble negligence of grammar and spelling; this is what Mr Pope calls (who by the by was a very bad poet) catching a grace beyond the reach of art; but these two arts, as Mr Sheridan says, I am afraid we know little about. I dare say he goes upon sure ground, and has good reasons for what he does; not that I have any particular reason for saying so. The epistle after the elegy seems to be much in the style of Pliny; there is nothing like it in our language. Easy and pathetic, sublime and natural, it presents us with a picture of love and friendship not to be paralleled; it is really a capital piece. These two poems ought indeed to be printed separately. I must here conclude; but I first congratulate Mr D—— on this, I may say, the second revival of letters. I did not indeed think of being guilty of the fault which I accused you of in the beginning of my letter; but as I intend to dine with you to-day, I shall resume this subject when I take leave of you. I am,

S I R,

Your most obedient humble servant;

Canongate, one o'clock.

A * * * * E * * * *

D

To

To the Honourable A * * * E * * *.

DEAR SIR,

A CCEPT the most sincere thanks of a mind full of gratitude, for the favour you have this day loaded me with. The exquisite entertainment which I have received from the perusal of the inclosed poems, is rather to be conceived than expressed. The critical letters upon these pieces by Mr D — and yourself, I admire beyond measure. The greatest compliment I can pay them, is to tell, without disguise, the simple, or, to use a better word, naked truth; which is, that I could read them with some degree of satisfaction, even after an immediate perusal of the poems themselves.

I CONGRATULATE with my country, that we now behold, with eyes full of intrepid wonder and premature astonishment, such a poet! and such critics!

IT is doing me too much honour to be classed with Mr E — and Mr D —, of both whose abilities

abilities the world has already had, and is likely to have so many glaring proofs; whilst I can only aspire to the appellation of, as it were, a hackney-coachman of Helicon. You see I am apt to run into the figurative style, which, I hope, you will impute to an imagination heated by a recent perusal of superlative poesy.

DEAR SIR, why do you ask me to give my opinion? — Or, indeed, what other opinion can I give than what has already been so amply given? — But as you insist upon my saying something, I shall do so.

THE elegy is perhaps the completest thing of the kind I have ever seen. Even you C——n E——, who plume yourself so much on your tender, sighing, breathing, and speaking lines, must not be offended, though I frankly own that you have not gone so great lengths as this gentleman.

THE PRIDE OF PRIME is an expression which you have not as yet attained to. I question much if you ever will.

THE

THE ingenious author of an essay on the sublime and beautiful gives it as his opinion, "That a certain inflated and incohesive rotundity of diction, is one of the leading sources of what is grand and lofty." Our author has certainly reached that dizzy summit in this memorable line,

To such majestic, such exalting strains.

THE epistle affords a striking example of the elevated style. — At first, indeed, I imagined our author had been a plagiarist, and stolen whole stanzas from Dryden's Alexander's Feast. — But, upon comparing the two poems together, with all the attention and accuracy that I possibly could, I discovered that I lay under a very palpable mistake, and had done the author much injustice: for, so far has he been from stooping to filch from Jack Dryden, (as the present Bishop of Bangor used to say), that, upon my word, there was not the least atom of similarity either in thought or language.

I HAD almost forgot to take notice of one peculiar circumstance, which has eluded the penetration of

of you, as well as that of Mr D——, although it is perhaps as material a perfection as any in the whole work: and that is the mention that is made of Wilkie, whose poem, called the *Epigoniad*, we have, with infinite regret, beheld but too too much neglected.

Does it not kindle a flame in every patriot breast, to think that now the modern epic poem of Scotland shall stand upon a firm basis, shall swim in a pellucid whirlpool, when it is at last hoisted upon the shoulders of a Brobdignagian genius (according to Swift), or rather, (to use the words of Sir William Temple, in his history of the Netherlands), when it is held forth to the applause and admiration of *posterity*, by a giant of Parnassus?

I ENTIRELY agree with my two good friends and fellow-rhymsters, that Mr Donaldson should make a distinct publication of them; as they will, by this means, be better known, and consequently more universally applied to use by every reader of any discernment.

I CANNOT conclude without an eulogium upon the justness and propriety of that line, when, drawing to a close, he exclaims, with all the rapture and poetic fury of the Pythian priestess,

I cease, I cease the empty lay.

I am persuaded no human mortal can possibly read this without a conscious home-felt satisfaction.

I HAVE now trespassed too long on your patience, so shall break off with assuring you that I am

Your most humble servant,

J * * * B * * *

To
 I have the pleasure to inform you that the
 following is the list of the names of the
 persons who have been elected to the
 office of the Secretary of the
 Society for the year 1811.

To the Editor of the SCOTTISH POEMS.

SIR,

IF the designed volumes of the Scotch Poems are not fully completed, you will please insert amongst them the two following pieces, should they deserve a place there. I had a few more which I was designing to have got ready for that purpose, but was prevented by some other more material concerns. If any further volumes are to be hereafter printed, you will signify it by a note in the present printing volume.——I am, Sir, yours, &c.

Strathaven, July 28. 1761.

J * * * B * * *

An ELEGY on the Death of an amiable
YOUNG LADY.

WHILE others sing the heroes glorious fate,
And tune to warlike strains the sounding
Their noble lives, their fearless deaths relate, [lyre,
Their gallant deeds, which wake the Muses fire ;

While

While British bards, to Wolfe's immortal praise,
 Rehearfe his victories and fatal doom;
 And as his monument the sculptors raise,
 Spread freshest garlands on their warrior's tomb?

Let me, whose humbler muse hath ne'er aspir'd
 To such majestic, such exalting strains,
 By elegiac song be now inspir'd,
 And mourn a virgin snatched from these plains.

Sweet wast thou, as the op'ning summer's rose,
 Too just an emblem of thee, lovely maid,
 Which in the morning buds, at mid-day blows,
 But withers by the chilly ev'ning's shade.

Calm and serene thou led thy peaceful life,
 Religion's sacred task thy only boast;
 Unknown to stormy passion, or to strife,
 Thou liv'd in ev'ry good, in friendship most.

Amid the joyful gaiety of youth,
 The Christian's dignity thou still preserv'd,
 Trod all the paths of piety and truth,
 Nor in thy actions nor thy precepts swerv'd.

Snatch'd

Snatch'd from this low, inhospitable clime,
 While fortune smil'd upon thy chearful head,
 Ev'n in the pride and flow'r of youthful prime
 Thou number'd lies, among the numerous dead,

Thy lovely sisters, and thy aged fire;
 In deep distress, thy hapless fate deplore;
 Praise thy past life, and, while they praise, admire
 And wail their charming friend, alas! no more,

No costly monument adorns thy tomb,
 No panegyric spreads thy humble fame;
 Nor verses, carv'd upon the sculptur'd dome,
 Transmit to after times thy virtuous name.

Oft as the circling sun returns the day
 On which thou mounted to th' realms of rest,
 Unto thy lonely grave I'll yearly hie,
 And bid the turf lie easy on thy breast.

I'll sprinkle flowers of ev'ry richest dye,
 And deck thy grave with wreaths of liveliest hue,
 Then shed a tear, and breathe the heaving sigh
 To sacred friendship; sure so much is due.

Farewell, my charmer, peace attend thy rest,
 Thou, who in virtue did so much excel;
 For this I hail thee blest, — supremely blest.
 Adieu, — adieu, — a long — a last farewell.

LYCIDAS to MENALCAS.

WHILE you in nature's works explore,
 The wonders of almighty pow'r,
 And, curious, Flora's works survey,
 While by your native streams you stray;
 From Fortha's banks to you I send
 The warmest wishes of a friend.
 Despise not then these humble lays,
 A friend excites your partial praise.
 A friend! — How the melodious name
 With nameless rapture trills my frame!
 What tho' the feeble muse detains
 Your ardent thought from nobler strains?
 Yet friendship's soft alluring joys
 With secret charms inchant your eyes.
 Now summer decks the russet plains:
 How sweet, how fair the rural scenes!
 Say,

Say, can the weak attempts of art,
 Like nature, charm the glowing heart?
 Can the coquet in dress how fair—
 With yonder lily's breast compare?
 Such,—such, MENALCAS, were our themes,
 While, by fair Glotta's lovely streams,
 We oft prolong'd the pleasant walk,
 By decent mirth and social talk:
 Such were our themes, when we survey'd
 New beauties in each length'ning mead—
 When ev'ning clos'd the setting day,
 How often did our footsteps stray
 O'er the gay banks of silver Clyde,
 Where Nature's native charms reside.
 Oft-times in the enamell'd mead,
 Or seated in a leafy shade,
 Sweet poetry our senses charm'd,
 And our imaginations warm'd;
 What time in WILKIE's flowing strains,
 WILKIE the HOMER of our plains,
 We view'd the fair Ætolian maid,
 By love, by too fond love betray'd.
 Love too did oft our speech employ,
 Love the pure source of social joy:

Love

Love — but what visions strike mine eyes!
 What forms, what heav'nly forms arise?
 AMMONIA here! — ah me! excuse
 The fallies of a wanton muse,
 That flies on fancy's wing away.
 I cease, — I cease the empty lay.
 Farewell, my friend. — Ye zephyrs bear
 My wishes to MENALCAS' ear.



FINIS